

Reaching one soldier at a time

Kristina Makey is a senior at Lamar School. Her parents are David and Jean Makey, and Kristina is the youngest of four children. She plays basketball and tennis and is the captain of the varsity cheerleading squad. The family attends Central United Methodist Church.

"The American Red Cross is truly special to me, and I have learned a lot from volunteering there," Kristina said. "I chose my subject for this story because I want youth to see what a difference they can make by giving a little bit of their time and energy."

By Kristina Makey
special to The Star

The tragedy of 9-11 shook the whole country. Since that world-changing event, I have watched as men and women from our community have gone overseas to support the war effort — and I have seen our community in action through the many fund-raisers that have been held.

I wanted to participate also, but I didn't know how I could help. I soon found a way to contribute by volunteering at the American Red Cross.

The first time I visited the American Red Cross, I was overwhelmed by how many odd jobs needed to be done. I have spent time there doing everything from helping pack more than 500 boxes to send to troops overseas, to designing newsletters, to addressing envelopes.

A few of the soldiers who received our packages wrote to the local ARC chapter thanking us for the goodies.

As part of my volunteer work, I responded to each of the letters. I told the troops how much we appreciate their hard work and how much we respect their bravery. I let them know that we support them 100 percent and that we are praying for them.

I included my address so they could reply to me at home if they wanted someone to talk to. I was inspired and deeply touched by the heartfelt responses I received.

Here are some excerpts from those letters.

"Thank you for your letter. Just remember that even though we are over here making history, y'all are busy sending goody boxes and letters to the soldiers here.

"We do appreciate knowing home is behind us — especially knowing ... there is so much controversy about us being here. Some of the Iraqi people want us here, but others do not and will try anything to get us to leave. As for the scenery here, it's nothing but sand. No trees or grass, basically nothing green. No flowers ..."

Kookie
(That's what everyone calls me)

"Many thanks for your letter and support. The work that you do is a blessing to all troops. May God bless you and people like you."

Bonnie

"I received your letter today. Thanks for writing back. I was in Meridian five days before we got activated. I had just started college at MCC. I am 21, soon to be 22. I am from Union. I have been in the military for three years. It is nice to know we have people proud of us for what we do. I guess when you sit down and think about it, soldiers are making a difference. It is hard to see that when you are over here. Thanks for the letter, the kind words and the prayers."

Spc. Holiday

"I got your letter in the mail the other day. Mail uplifts the spirits. I let my battle buddy read your letter and she told me that she will write you also. Her name is LaTonya Eades. Well, my name is Pamela Spivey. I am 20 years old ... Before I got activated I was a college student. I was attending East Central Community College. I have one semester left ...

"Well, life over here is OK, but never better than home. This is the longest I have ever been away from my family ... It is very hot over here. During midday it is around 116 degrees, and at night around 96 degrees ... It was very thoughtful of you to write me. Thanks for your concern."

Pamela Spivey

What I learned from my volunteer experience at the Red Cross is that every little bit helps — from a small task like writing a letter to a soldier to a big task like gathering supplies for the troops.

We can all do our part in helping with the war effort. As youth, it is easy to think our community doesn't need us. We're busy with school, sports and extracurricular activities, and we don't "have time" for anything else.

However, if youth could actually read these letters that I received and see just how much soldiers need our thoughts and prayers, they would find volunteering worthwhile.

These letters really put a face and name to each soldier. I realized their heroism and pride in defending our country — as well as their heartache and loneliness at being away from home for so long.

If every person in Meridian wrote a letter to a soldier, think about how many soldiers we would reach. I hope these letters touch your heart as they have touched mine.



PHOTOS BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

PEN PALS

Kristina Makey, right, met a lot of U.S. troops through the mail because of her volunteer job at the American Red Cross in Meridian. Some of her correspondence is shown above. Kristina says writing letters "really put a face and name to each soldier."

